

Step 5: Making It Happen

There's no way around it; to get into college you need to apply. Depending on your school of choice, this might mean taking tests, getting ready for an interview, or even writing an essay. High school students usually know all of this. But that doesn't answer the big questions...

What do colleges really want? How do colleges decide who gets in? What criteria do colleges use? For many, this is a big mystery. Well, not anymore. Making it happen takes the guesswork out of college admissions. Read on to learn more.

Admissions Policies

Community and technical colleges have open admissions policies. Anyone with a high school diploma can apply, enroll, and take classes.

To get into most four-year colleges you have to compete with other students. This is called competitive admissions. When you think about applying to college, usually competitive admissions schools come to mind.

Whether you choose a school with an open or competitive admissions policy, you will still have to meet high standards to earn a degree.

What do colleges want to know?

Colleges want to know that you have the basic skills you'll need to be successful. At competitive schools (most four-year colleges), they'll try to figure that out by looking at your grades, test scores, and personal background. They also look at your activities and potential for success. Sometimes colleges are very specific about the grades and test scores students should have. Most colleges, however, don't have a fixed "cutoff" for grades, rank in class, or test scores. They want to know about your entire school record and personal history.

Two-year community and technical colleges (schools with open admissions) also want to make sure you've got the basic skills you need. They'll do that by making sure you have a high school diploma. Once you get into the college, you have to show you're ready for college-level classes. You do this by taking placement tests. These don't determine whether or not you get in, but tell the college which level of English, math, or world language you should take. If for some reason you're not ready for college-level classes in some subjects, you can still attend and take the classes you need to prepare.

What goes into an admissions or application packet?

Four-year schools usually want:

- ▶ A completed application form
- ▶ Application fee (fee waivers are available)
- ▶ Official high school transcripts
- ▶ ACT® or SAT® score reports
- ▶ A personal statement or writing sample
- ▶ Two or three letters of recommendation, and
- ▶ Possibly an interview or portfolio

Community and technical colleges usually ask for:

- ▶ A completed application form, and
- ▶ An application fee (fee waivers are available)

What happens to your application once you send it in?

At Washington's public four-year colleges and universities, your application will go through a couple of review steps.

Phase 1: Admissions Index

In phase 1, applications receive an Admissions Index (AI) score. This gives colleges a quick way to compare you to other students. Reviewers will also make sure you meet the school's minimum admissions index score requirements. For the University of Washington and Washington State University, the minimum score is 28. At The Evergreen State College, Western Washington University, Central Washington University, and Eastern Washington University, the minimum score is 13.

Washington's Admission Index gives students points based on their grade point average (GPA) and SAT I® or ACT® test scores. Grade point averages are calculated on a 4.0 scale and count three times as much as test scores. No extra points are given for honors, AP®, IB®, or other college credit classes.

If you have a high admissions index score (usually above 75), and meet all other course requirements, you will probably get into your college of choice without more review. Applications with lower scores will move on to phase 2 of the process, freshman review.

The Admissions Index chart on the next page shows you what test scores and GPA you need to have the best chance of going to Washington's four-year public colleges. Don't be too upset if your AI score is not where you want it to be. This chart is just an estimate of your odds. Talk to your school counselor, teachers, and others about the standards at your college of choice.

Finally, out-of-state and private colleges and universities may have a similar two-step process, but their standards for grades, test scores, and required high school classes may be different. Check with your school counselor or the admissions office at your school of choice for details.

Phase 2: Freshman Review

In phase 2, freshman review, admissions officers try to learn more about you. They want to know what you can offer the school, why you chose to apply, and whether you and the school are a good fit. Colleges might ask for a personal statement, interview, portfolio, or letter of recommendation.

Admissions staff will consider everything including your grades, test scores, personal background, special talents, involvement in activities, and more. If you've earned decent grades, done OK on the SAT I® or ACT®, and been involved in activities, you'll have a good chance of getting in. If you haven't done those things, you might have a tougher time.

Now, don't freak out or anything. Colleges know that some students don't get good grades as freshmen or sophomores, and sometimes students don't do well on tests. Freshman review is your chance to talk about any problems you faced and how you handled things. Colleges want to see that you've turned (or are turning) things around.

Online College Applications

Consider completing your college applications on the Internet. Often, you can submit applications to several schools at the same time. In some cases, you can also save money by paying reduced application fees. For more information, visit each college's Web site.

Freshman Admissions Index for Washington's Public Four-year Colleges and Universities

- ▶ Central Washington University
- ▶ Eastern Washington University
- ▶ The Evergreen State College
- ▶ University of Washington
- ▶ Washington State University
- ▶ Western Washington University

Test Scores		High School Grade Point Average (GPA)*																				
ACT®	SAT®	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.9	4.0
11	500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	9	14	18	22	27	31	36	40	44	49	53
12	560	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	7	12	16	21	25	29	34	38	42	47	51	55
13	620	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	10	14	19	23	27	32	36	41	45	49	54	58
14	680	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	8	13	17	21	26	30	34	39	43	47	52	56	60
15	740	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	6	11	15	19	24	28	32	37	41	46	50	54	59	63
16	780	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	8	12	17	21	25	30	34	38	43	47	52	56	60	65
17	830	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	10	14	19	23	27	32	36	41	45	49	54	58	62	67
18	870	0	0	0	0	0	3	7	12	16	20	25	29	34	38	42	47	51	55	60	64	68
19	910	0	0	0	0	0	5	9	13	18	22	26	31	35	40	44	48	53	57	61	66	70
20	950	0	0	0	0	2	6	11	15	19	24	28	33	37	41	46	50	54	59	63	67	72
21	990	0	0	0	0	4	8	12	17	21	25	30	34	39	43	47	52	56	60	65	69	73
22	1030	0	0	0	1	5	10	14	18	23	27	31	36	40	45	49	53	58	62	66	71	75
23	1070	0	0	0	3	7	11	16	20	24	29	33	38	42	46	51	55	59	64	68	72	77
24	1110	0	0	0	4	9	13	17	22	26	30	35	39	44	48	52	57	61	65	70	74	78
25	1140	0	0	1	6	10	14	19	23	27	32	36	40	45	49	54	58	62	67	71	75	80
26	1180	0	0	3	7	12	16	20	25	29	33	38	42	46	51	55	60	64	68	73	77	81
27	1220	0	0	5	9	13	18	22	26	31	35	39	44	48	53	57	61	66	70	74	79	83
28	1250	0	1	6	10	15	19	23	28	32	36	41	45	49	54	58	63	67	71	76	80	84
29	1300	0	4	8	12	17	21	25	30	34	38	43	47	52	56	60	65	69	74	78	82	86
30	1340	1	5	10	14	18	23	27	31	36	40	44	49	53	58	62	66	71	75	79	84	88
31	1380	3	7	11	16	20	24	29	33	37	42	46	50	55	59	64	68	72	77	81	85	89
32	1420	4	9	13	17	22	26	30	35	39	43	48	52	57	61	65	70	74	78	83	87	91
33	1470	6	11	15	19	24	28	32	37	41	46	50	54	59	63	67	72	76	80	85	89	94
34	1520	8	13	17	21	26	30	35	39	43	48	52	56	61	65	69	74	78	83	87	91	95
35	1580	11	15	20	24	28	33	37	41	46	50	54	59	63	68	72	76	81	85	89	94	98
36	1600	12	16	20	25	29	34	38	42	47	51	55	60	64	68	73	77	81	86	90	95	99

Find the row with your ACT or SAT score on the left side. Follow it across until you reach the column with your approximate GPA at the top. The point where your test score and GPA intersect is your Admissions Index.

*GPA's are calculated on an unweighted 4.0 scale. (That means no bonus points for honors, IB, or AP classes)

*The Admissions Index is used as a guide by all of the four-year public universities in the state of Washington, but is not the only factor considered. Cumulative GPA is approximately three times as important as test scores in determining the Admissions Index. ACT and SAT are not equivalent tests, but the formula uses this approximate conversion chart to calculate Admissions Index.

Refer to reverse side for Admissions Index distribution and application review guidelines for Western Washington University

What You Should Know about the Admission Index

1. The Admissions Index is only a starting point. Most applications are subject to Freshman Review. That's where admissions staff read your materials more carefully. Then, you can really show what you offer the school.
2. The index calculation makes grades three times as important as test scores. It's better to get good grades in challenging classes than to stress out over test scores.
3. High index scores don't mean much if you haven't taken the required or recommended courses for your college of choice. Make sure you're taking the classes your college of choice requires.
4. Whatever your score on the Admissions Index, put lots of thought into your college applications. Admissions staff read and review everything you submit. Take each part of the admissions process seriously.
5. Finally, community colleges, technical colleges, and apprenticeship programs don't use the Admissions Index. Anyone with a high school diploma or GED can apply to participate in these schools and programs. Through community or technical colleges, you can earn a two-year associate's degree and transfer to a four-year college later.

Criteria Colleges May Use in Freshman Review

1. Are you taking more academic classes than you are required to take?
2. Are your senior year courses challenging?
3. Are you taking (or planning to take) honors, Advanced Placement (AP[®]), or International Baccalaureate (IB[®]) classes?
4. Are you taking (or planning to take) college classes while you're still in high school, including Running Start or Tech Prep?
5. Have your grades and test scores improved over time?
6. Have you received any academic awards?
7. Does your high school have an unusually tough grading system?
8. Do you often participate in school or community activities? Do you play an active or leadership role?
9. Have you overcome a disability or other hardship? Do you bring diversity or a multicultural awareness?
10. Do you have a special athletic or artistic talent?

Writing a Personal Statement

The personal statement is an important part of most college applications. It's your opportunity to show the admissions committee that you have personality, opinions, and experiences to share. It also demonstrates that you can write at the college level. Here are some tips on writing a great personal statement.

► Be yourself.

Don't tell people what you think they want to hear. If you're serious, write a serious essay. If you're funny, try to express your sense of humor while getting a serious message across. Be honest and true to yourself. Colleges want to know what makes you unique.

► Start on the right foot.

Take time to write a great opening paragraph. This makes the reader want to keep reading. Some people even write the opening paragraph last, when they know what they want to say. Just don't get too carried away. Your essay should be brief.

► Talk about issues or problems.

Your essay could be a discussion of some issue or problem that interests you. Just make sure you choose an issue people relate to or find interesting. This is also your chance to explain any challenges you faced in school or out.

► Write, revise, and revise again.

Don't try to write your personal statement at the last minute. You could end up with careless typos or spelling errors. Get someone you trust like a teacher, counselor, parent, or friend to read your essay and provide feedback. Then, put your essay aside for a while and come back to it later with a fresh perspective.



“Speak
up for
Yourself,
or you'll end up
a rug.”

—Mae West

Requesting Letters of Recommendation

If you plan to apply to a four-year college or university, you will probably need letters of recommendation. You can get letters from teachers, coaches, counselors, family friends, or any other adult who knows you well. Start thinking now about people you could ask. Give yourself some time to make a good impression. Listed below are some other things you can do.

It's in your best interest to give people a good impression of you. But, don't assume that a few days of good behavior can make up for years of goofing off. These tips won't make people forget the bad stuff. The goal is to help them remember the good.

► Be an active participant in class.

It helps you learn and shows your teachers that you care about course subjects.

► Take advantage of teacher study hours.

If your teacher offers a review session before or after class, go to it! Again, it shows your teacher that you care about learning and go out of your way to do your best. Regardless of the grade you get, your teacher will still have a good impression of you.

► Stop by to visit old teachers, coaches, etc.

Whether it's your ninth grade counselor or your junior varsity coach, stop in to visit, talk, and remember old times. This gives you a chance to refresh their memories of your work ethic and personality.

► Request letters at least one month in advance.

Adults are busy people and they may get lots of recommendation requests. If you get your request in early and beat the rush, you won't be panicked waiting for your letter to be finished. This also shows that you know it will take time and planning to write a good letter. Most people appreciate the extra notice.

► Show up to work on time.

Be the best worker you can be and give each customer a smile. Your boss will notice the extra effort and initiative. You might also try volunteering for extra responsibilities.

► Get to know your boss and coworkers.

In order for someone to write you a convincing letter of recommendation, they have to feel they know you well. Talk to people you want to recommend you, and let them get to know the real you.

► Give people what they need.

Prepare a resume with your special achievements and give it to your recommender. That way, your letter is specifically tailored for you. Don't assume adults will remember all that you've done. If there is a special project or class you want them to mention, write a note suggesting they include it in your letter.

► Follow up with a thank you note.

Saying thank you in person is nice, but writing a follow-up note is always better. Take time to deliver a thank you note to each of your references.